

Federal grant will fund 100 percent of construction.

**By Amber Williams
Dallas County News**

Construction has begun on the first state-owned and operated veterans cemetery in the state of Iowa. The new Iowa veterans cemetery (IVC) is located in Dallas County, near Van Meter. With a \$7.6 million grant from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the earth-moving phase of the 96 acres of donated land is underway.

"We are proud to partner with the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs to establish this cemetery," said VA Secretary Jim Nicholson. "It will greatly expand the opportunity for Iowa veterans to be buried in a place that commemorates their service and sacrifice."

Although the cemetery will welcome eligible veterans from across the nation, its Van Meter location is especially convenient for the approximate 70,000 veterans and their families living in the area. In fact, at the initial whisper of its construction, 70 people have already applied for burials at the cemetery, according to Steve Young, Iowa Veterans Cemetery Director.

"This is really Iowa's Arlington National Cemetery," said Young, who has spent his spring visiting other national veteran cemeteries across the country.

"Other places I've seen—they're all very nice, but they're kind of flat and not well

marked — hard to identify in some cases," Young explained. "Iowa just seems to be doing it right. We have a good team out here, and I couldn't be more excited about this."

Part of Young's excitement, as a Dallas County resident himself, is the scenic location on the southern hillside along Interstate 80, where "we have a very prominent location that not only Iowans, but any one passing through can see."

"Dallas County has really been honored by this," he said.

hay field, Young admires the IVC as having this "Iowa flavor" that makes it unique among the other veteran cemeteries in the country.

To draw the eye of passers-by along I-80, a seven-foot tall stone wall will stand as a marker of its location and a symbol of Dallas County's patriotism. Shaped like a boomerang, one side of the wall will face I-80 and the other half will face west along R16. The wall will stretch 60 feet from each end to its pivoting point in the center.

Iowa Veterans Cemetery Burial Standards

- There is no charge for any eligible veterans to be buried at IVC.
- Eligible family members pay a \$300 interment fee and can be buried along side their veteran family member
- Burial options include in-ground burial of caskets and cremated remains and above-ground placement of remains in a columbarium niche.
- A standard government upright granite headstone/niche marker is provided at no cost to veteran

In general, the military service requirements for burial in the IVC are:

- Veteran discharged from "active duty" under honorable conditions
- Veteran who died while on "active duty"
- Veteran who served at least 20 years in the National Guard or Reserves and qualified for military retirement pay (or would have qualified except death occurred before age 60)

"I-80 is one of the highly travelled exchanges across the country."

With one of Iowa's most bustling interstates to the north, the Raccoon River to the south and a location amidst the rolling hills of a local farmer's

In black metal letters, it will bear the name, Iowa Veterans Cemetery and will be illuminated at night.

"Of course, to have it built during construction is obviously really important to us," Young said of the IVC wall,



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IVC Director, Steve Young, right, meets with Jeff Stein, middle, and Leroy Wagner of Xenia Rural Water, left, to discuss construction progress. Behind them, McAninch Construction does initial land shaping work.

however the federal grant will not pay for the marker along the interstate, only at the cemetery's entrance. Therefore, money is being raised for the construction of the I-80 wall.

While the \$7.6 million will fund 100 percent of allowable costs of the cemetery's construction and that of nearly 10,000 full-casket grave sites, 750 in-ground cremation sites, 768 columbarium niches, a memorial walkway, a storage building, utilities, landscaping and irrigation systems, funding for the illuminated wall will have to come from private donors, as well as any memorials and beautification projects, according to Young.

The fund-raising efforts began on June 15. The donation program is designed for families, friends and organizations to memorialize the gratitude of the nation and the state to its veterans. This can be manifested through an avenue of flags, commemorative benches, artwork, engraved walkway stones and other examples.

For the wall, though, the "Friends" Donation Campaign exceeds a \$100,000 goal.

"Since the end of June 9, donation totalling \$1,080 have been received," reported Young. "We really need to raise the money before the end of the year so that I can direct the contractor to move forward

during construction."

Even Gov. Chet Culver advocates for the fund-raising project, citing the importance of the wall as a symbol along the interstate, calling it a "public statement of respect."

"Lt. Governor Patty Judge and I have deep respect and admiration for the sacrifices made by our veterans, and the daily challenges encountered by all of our active duty military members and their families," he wrote. "We are proud of you all."

For more information, visit the IVC website at www.iowa-va.org or call the Iowa Department of Veteran Affairs at 515-242-5331.